



# Australian Bureau of Statistics

## 1301.3 - Year Book Queensland, 1901

ARCHIVED ISSUE Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 23/12/1901

This article is extracted from **Queensland Year Book 1901 (pp. 12)**

### HISTORICAL SKETCH

[Contributed by W. H. TRAILL, Esq.]

ON the 16th of May, 1770, Lieutenant James Cook, R.N., commanding His Majesty's exploring ship, "Endeavour", skirting northward what he was convinced was the east coast of a great southern continent, the existence of which had previously only been conjectured, saw some distance inland, a hill rising above the general elevation of a range. Almost simultaneously he became aware of a formidable row of reefs, the partially submerged prolongation of the landward range, stretching far into the ocean. To the promontory whence these reefs protruded he gave the name of Point Danger, and to the hill which signalled their situation, that of Mount Warning. Ninety years later, that point was the geographical starting station whence the boundary separating the Colony of Queensland from New South Wales was defined.

Pursuing his voyage, Cook, wafted by a fresh southerly breeze and keeping at a distance of about 6 miles from the coast, as the afternoon of the following day wore on, again saw breakers on the larboard bow, and beyond, a little further north, a headland, to which, in the same vein of suggestive nomenclature which had prompted him in the case of Mount Warning, he gave the designation of Point Lookout. Just beyond this point, to the north of it, the shore receded, and "forms a wide open bay" to quote from Cook's journal, "in the bottom of which the land is so low that I could but just see it from the topmost head". To this wide open bay he gave the name of Morton's Bay, a very moderate tribute to Earl Morton, who in 1764 was President of the Royal Society and one of the Commissioners of Longitude. As if by way of additional consideration, Cook appended the name of Morton also to the headland next in view, which he regarded as the northern point of the bay. Thus, it is clear that the Morton Bay of Cook is the wide and very slight indentation made by the inclination of the coast lines between Point Lookout and Cape Moreton towards the South Passage, which gives difficult access to the present Moreton Bay. From the situation whence his observations from the topmast head seem to have been taken viz., five or six miles due east of Point Lookout - the low sandy land at Amity Point and the southern extremity of Moreton Island would appear to blend and join. The Moreton Bay of today Cook neither named nor, apparently, entered. It was not his business to sail up every indentation. He was serving the purposes of geography, not of topography. Such remarks as were proper for him to make he made. He recorded that "from C. Morton the land trends away W., further than we could see, further is a small space where we could see no land; some on board were of opinion that there is a river, because the sea looked paler than usual. Upon sounding, we found 34 fathoms, fine white sandy bottom, which alone is sufficient to change the apparent colour of Sea Water, without the Assistance of Rivers... Be this as it may, it was a point that could not be cleared up as we had the wind; but should anyone be desirous of doing it that should come after me, this place may always be found by three hills which lay to the northward of it in the Lat. of 26° 53' S". Then follows a description of these hills to which Cook then gave the name they have borne ever since the Glasshouses. Here, at the threshold of the harbour into which discharges a river destined to have on its banks the capital of a British State, Cook, all unconscious of its

future, neither anchored nor entered. Pursuing his voyage he sighted and named Double Island Point, passed the opening to Wide Bay, and distinguished on the next bluff headland numerous natives, progenitors, doubtless, of those aborigines who three quarters of a century later barbarously maltreated and murdered a crew of shipwrecked mariners. To this bluff he gave the name of Indian Head. Today we know that it is a projection on Great Sandy Island. To Cook it naturally appeared to be a headland of the mainland, and even when on the 20th he rounded and anchored to leeward of Sandy Cape, with Hervey's Bay extending to the south and east, the fact that it connected with Wide Bay was not and could not be plain to him. He had passed the mouth of the Mary River, masked by Great Sandy Island, a wilderness of sandy forest and swamp, and his vessel lay directly opposite to the mouth of the Burnett, a stream on whose upper basin countless flocks and herds were later to thrive on the pasturages and enrich their owners, and on whose banks, nearer the mouth, wide fields of sugar-cane were to replace the tangled and impassable semi-tropical jungles. It is not necessary to detail the successive stages of this voyage. Regarded in its entirety, it is worthy to take rank with the exploit of the navigator who, in the days of Pharaoh Necho, coasted Africa from the Red Sea and doubled the Cape. With the circumnavigation of the same continent in the opposite course by Vasco de Gama, and with the famous expeditions of Columbus and of Magellan, Cook outlined the entire eastern seaboard of a continent hitherto only supposed to exist. Picturesque and romantic incidents to give attraction to his exploration were lacking indeed. The territory he skirted, and upon which he occasionally landed, was almost absolutely in a state of nature. Human labour, guided by intelligence, had done nothing to convert its fertility into commodities and to collect what civilised mankind recognises as wealth. The inhabitants Cook encountered were savages almost as devoid of intellect as of garments. They had nothing to exchange - neither barbaric bangles of gold, nor corn, nor fruit, nor ideas. There were no mild and tractable tribes to enslave. There were no rich and gorgeous, pompous and feeble, kingdoms to cajole and then to plunder. Naked savages, of intellect so embryotic that they passed from complaisance to fury without appreciable cause, rather infested than inhabited the land. Because these lacked everything which to the civilised man appears essential for enjoyment, for comfort, even for decency, it seemed probable that the land they lived in must be sterile and barren. The "Endeavour" had skirted the coast for thousands of miles. Her master, his associated men of science, and his crew, had visited other lands in equal latitudes, inhabited by simple barbarians; but nowhere else had they touched on shores so uninviting or people so wretched. They had not, in the whole course of their Australian voyagings, seen even a village or a cultivated yam-patch. Even personal vanity, which is innate in all members of the human race, had among the abject aborigines of Australia found for itself no decent expression. Elsewhere barbarous peoples decorate their persons with native metals which glitter and do not tarnish, and with pebbles that gleam and shine. But these brutal natives hung no flakes or beads of gold upon their naked women, and their males had conceived for their own embellishment no better decoration than ridges of their own scarred flesh, with resplendent bedaubings of dirt for great occasions.

This was not a territory nor was this a population to excite much interest, and Cook had no inducement to linger nor any to make frequent landings. He made the best speed, compatible with safety and with observation, of the coastline to the northward, noting the successive alternations of capes and indentations as he proceeded, fixing latitudes and longitudes and conferring names as he sailed along. He had reached halfway between the 16th and 17th parallel of S. latitude without any incident to break the monotony, when, his ship striking a submerged reef, his adventurous career nearly came to a tragical end. Although on this particular night the experienced commander was proceeding with even more than his customary great caution, he was subjected to one of those perils of voyaging in uncharted seas which no experience can provide against and no prudence avert. Having during the evening perceived ahead in the direct course indications of obstacles, and knowing, moreover, that he was now arrived near the latitude assigned to some islands discovered by the Spanish navigator De Quiros, Cook had shortened sail upon the "Endeavour" and tacked out from the land close-hauled, to get an offing during the night. He had the advantages of moonlight and a fine working breeze, and kept the lead constantly going. Several alarms, consequent on eccentric shoalings and redeepening of

the bottom, kept the ship's company on the alert. But just when ample and uniform depth of water seemed to have been attained, and the scientific and artistic gentlemen had left the deck with their minds at ease and had gone to bed, there was again a rapid shoaling, and before the lead could be recast the vessel struck and began to grind on a reef. The land was distant about 8 leagues. Fortunately, the brisk breeze died away, and the tide was not at its highest. The ship's bottom had been perforated by the rocks, and the utmost efforts of all hands at the pumps barely coped with the inflow of the sea. These efforts, too, were so strenuous that it was clearly impossible that they could be long sustained. Cook's own narrative, simple but graphic, as embodied in his journal, has been preserved and printed, and is accessible to any reader who desires to acquaint himself with the particulars of this terrible adventure. It must suffice for our present purposes to state that after throwing overboard guns and other deadweight to the extent of 50 tons, and experiencing several vicissitudes of hope and despair, the commander and crew, after resorting to every device which skill and ingenuity could suggest in such a plight, managed to reach in their vessel a harbour which a boat's crew, detached for the purpose in the pinnace, had discovered, where a small river fell into the ocean under the shelter of a bold headland. This refuge was reached in a few hours, a pleasant breeze wafting the leaky bark gently to its destination. It was not, however, until she had twice grounded on banks of muddy sand, which obstruct the channel, that the "Endeavour" was at last warped up the harbour, and, being secured to its southern shore at a chosen spot, beached at high water. Two months were spent in this haven, occupied by the mechanics in repairing the injuries in the ship's bottom, by the naturalists in their scientific pursuits, the artists in portraying the scenery, and by the invalids among the crew in recuperating. It is to a scape of sea and land by one of the artists that identification of the precise spot where Cook careened his vessel to replace the planks smashed by the reef, has within recent times been possible. A view taken from a little distance out in the harbour depicted the "Endeavour" lying, canted over, on the beach. The form of the hills in the background, faithfully represented, renders recognition easy. At this precise spot, within the last few years, there have been unearthed part of a cask still containing a quantity of tar or pitch, and several cannon balls have been found, just above the level of high tide. From the reef where the "Endeavour" struck, also one of the guns jettisoned to lighten the ship has also been recovered.

The ship having been repaired, on the 4th August she was warped out of the harbour, and the river of which it formed the estuary, and to which the name of the "Endeavour" was given, was abandoned to its pristine solitude, not again to be a resort of Europeans until more than a century had elapsed. Cook recommenced his voyage northward, and after being baffled in his purpose of navigating close to the coast, by the delusively insular appearances of a projection, which he stigmatised as Cape Flattery, weary of the constant anxieties imposed upon him by the perils of the coast on one hand, and the long chain of the Barrier reefs on the other, he sought an outlet through the latter, and succeeding, reached the open ocean. His journal records the sense of relief experienced by the whole ship's company. During little less than three months they had voyaged, entangled among reefs and shoals, 360 leagues, without once, even for a minute, being without a man in the chains, heaving the lead.

Within a fortnight, however, the familiar troubles had again to be braved. It became imperative to again return within sight of land lest the passage alleged to exist between north-eastern New Holland and New Guinea should be missed - if such passage there really was. In the attempt to get inside the Great Barrier Reef, the voyagers experienced perils more terrible than any which they had previously been subjected to. As they neared the line of reef, the wind fell. The depth of ocean precluded any possibility of anchoring. Tide and current carried them towards the reefs, over which the waves broke, foaming to a vast height. Fate sported with them with feline cruelty; now they drifted within 100 yards of the deadly rocks, and anon, when their destruction seemed but a matter of minutes, a turn of the tide or a light air wafted them to temporary safety. At last, however, fortune, relenting, permitted them to float, hustled by the reflow of the tide, through an opening, to which gratitude gave the name of Providential Channel. The coasting process was resumed, and, on the 21st August, Cook was enabled to cast anchor among the islands lying off the north-eastern promontory of New Holland, which has ever since borne the name then given

to it by him Cape York. Landing on one of the islands, Cook, although he had previously performed the ceremony at various parts, hoisted English colours, and formally took possession of the whole eastern coast from latitude 38 degrees to this spot in latitude 10.5 degrees S., in right of His Majesty King George the Third, by the name of New South Wales, with all the bays, harbours, rivers, and islands situated upon it. Then, re-embarking from Possession Island, he set sail, sought no further to define the coast line of New Holland, but directed his course for Batavia, *en route* for England.

Cook had not been favourably impressed by what he saw of the eastern coast lands of Australia. There was, however, one place where the naturalists of the expedition had found some attractions. Plants - heather and so forth - quite new to them there abounded. They called it Botany Bay, and reported on it in terms of considerably exaggerated favour when they returned to England. A few years later, the British Government having lost the North American plantations by the successful revolt of the colonists, were much embarrassed for lack of a place whither to send sentenced criminals. An experiment of confining them in a settlement on the west coast of Africa had proved a deadly failure. That the convicts died there as if a murrain afflicted them was perhaps only felt as a moderate grief. But the officers and others in charge also died so fast that there was a chance that the surviving criminals would some day have no one living to control them. The coast of New Holland might not be an ideal place in the ordinary sense, but, as described by Cook and his companions, it struck the worried authorities as an ideal place for the reception and retention of criminals. Botany Bay was vouched for as a secure harbour. The land bordering on it was represented as attractive, and probably fertile if cultivated. Consequently a fleet was prepared, the gaols opened their portals, and, under the charge of a naval captain with a couple of hundred marines to support his authority, and a handful of civil officials, and other free persons, 504 male and 192 female convicts were despatched to take such chances as might befall at a place which could not be reached in less than six months. How the rocky shores of Sydney Harbour were preferred to the swamps of Botany Bay as soon as seen, how the experiment struggled through difficulties and succeeded, need not be detailed. It is sufficient for our purpose to state that the penal settlement at Sydney prospered not only as such, but also as a sort of naval base whence renewed coastal exploration could be and was undertaken. The second Governor, Captain Hunter, R.N., in 1799 despatched Mr. Flinders - who had come out with him as midshipman, and had already distinguished himself by hardihood in coastal exploration to the southward - to supplement the information furnished by Cook, especially with regard to Glasshouse and Hervey's Bays. For this purpose Governor Hunter placed Flinders in command of the "Norfolk," a sloop of 25 tons, built not long before at Norfolk Island, and to a crew already tested by Flinders' previous expedition to define Bass' Straits - discovered a little earlier by him and Surgeon Bass in a tiny open boat - a tamed aboriginal, Bongaree, was added, to facilitate communication with any natives who might be encountered.

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This page last updated 4 April 2013

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